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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004919

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [KDP](#)

SUBJECT: TURCOMAN CLAIMS OF KURDISH ATTACK ON IRAQI HOUSING MINISTER

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Islamic Union of Iraqi Turcomans leader Abbas al-Bayyati on December 5, he confirmed reports that the Iraqi Housing Minister, Jassim Jaafar (an ethnic Turcoman) was ambushed while visiting the Turcoman city of Tuz Khurmato in Salah-ad-Din province in late November. Both Jaafar and Bayyati are accusing the Kurdish Pesh Merga forces of attacking the minister twice during his trip as an attempt to intimidate the Turcoman population during a period of escalating Kurdish-Turcoman tensions in the region. In a separate telephone conversation with the KDP,s head of Public Affairs Falah Bakir on December 6, however, Bakir denied any KDP involvement in the attacks on Jaafar and suggested that the PUK was to blame. The PUK, in turn, denied any involvement and accused Jaafar,s convoy of firing randomly into a crowd and instigating the attack. On elections, Bayyati denied hearing any complaints about voter registration fraud or intimidation, and blamed former Prime Minister Allawi for inflaming public sentiment with his comments on Saddam Husayn. End Summary.

(U) Turcomen Accuse the KDP

2. (C) Iraqi press reports on November 28 quoted Housing Minister Jaafar as saying he was ambushed in Tuz Khurmato by National Guardsmen on November 24. According to Turcoman politician Bayyati, there were two separate attacks on Jaafar. The first occurred inside Tuz Khurmato, when the convoy stopped at a gas station. Bayyati alleged that a KDP captain started firing a machine gun at the convoy and it was only with the assistance of the MNF-I that he was safely brought out of the city. The second alleged attack occurred when the minister,s convoy narrowly missed being hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) as it was crossing through the Hamreen Mountains path towards Baghdad. By this point, the MNF-I escort had turned back to Salah-ad-Din. (Comment: This is the route most commonly used between Salah-ad-Din and Baghdad, according to Bayyati. End Comment.)

3. (C) In response to PolOff,s query on why they suspected the KDP, Bayyati claimed that the Kurds were seeking control over the area from the Hamreen Mountains to Zakho City, without interference from other political groups such as the Turcomen. (Comment: Bayyati's claim would mean that the Kurds would control over most of northeastern Iraq: parts of Diyala, Salah ad-Din, At Tamim, and Ninewa provinces, as well as the traditional Kurdish regions of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulymaniyah. A map some Kurdish constitution negotiators passed around showed even greater Kurdish ambitions to absorb parts of Wasit province into greater Kurdistan, ostensibly to include the Faily Kurds. End Comment.)

(U) The KDP Denies Guilt

4. (C) In a separate telephone conversation with the KDP,s head of Public Affairs Falah Bakir on December 6, Bakir denied any KDP involvement in the attacks on Jaafar and suggested to PolOff that the PUK was to blame. There is no Pesh Merga presence in either Tuz Khurmato or the Hamreen Mountain region, according to Bakir. (Comment: In addition to his media role, Falah Bakir is also KDP leader Masud Barzani,s political advisor and official translator. End Comment.)

5. (C) PUK-affiliated TNA member Sadoon Faily denied the KDP accusations of involvement to PolOff on December 7. According to Faily,s contacts in the PUK,s Tuz Khurmato office, the minister,s convoy tried to clear its way to the fuel station by randomly firing into the crowd. During the shooting, a child was injured and the angry crowd started to attack the minister,s guards. Faily accused Jaafar of starting this rumor of Kurdish involvement to cover the fact that the parents of the injured child, who are Turcomen, have initiated legal action against Jaafar.

(U) Bayyati,s Assessment on Elections?

16. (C) Moving to the elections, Bayyati said the inclusion of the Sunni Arabs would mean more challenges ahead politically for Iraq, but denied hearing any reports of election fraud and voter intimidation in the run-up to the December election. He blamed any violence on former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, stating that things were going smoothly until Allawi went to Najaf. Instead of inflaming people with his comments on Saddam Husayn, cautioned Bayyati, Allawi should talk about what his party can offer. The Shia Islamists, Sunni Arabs, and the Kurds are the &metal lists,8 so named by Iraqis because of their overwhelming strength in the polls. Bayyati bemoaned the fact that Iraq currently was holding sectarian elections, rather than political ones. &Right now,8 said Bayyati, &the Iraqi people don,t understand the word secularism,, just as they don,t understand federalism.,8 He did hold out hope, however, that Iraqis eventually would become more politically savvy.

Comment

17. (C) We are not sure of exactly what happened in Tuz Khurmatu with the Housing Minister. Like other incidents along the fault lines between Iraqi ethnic groups, there are plenty of claims and counter-claims. The incident serves to remind that there are other ethnic tensions beyond those involving Kurds and Arabs that simmer just below the surface of Iraqi society.
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